

HISTORY TALK

FROM THE UPPER FLORIDA KEYS

ISSUE 35 LEE POORBAUGH EDITION SPRING, 2006



Sisal fields and processing plant at St. James on Pine Island, ca. 1910

- **TABLE OF CONTENTS** -

- 1800s - Dr. Henry Perrine - Page 553
- Mr. Perrine's Statement - Page 562
- Agave Sisalana - Page 564

Dr. Henry Perrine
By Jerry Wilkinson

PROLOGUE

Henry Edward Perrine was a descendant of a French Huguenot family that settled in New Jersey around the year 1665. Henry's grandparents spelled their name *Perrin*. Exactly when the final (e) was added to the name is not known by the author, but it was there by the time that Henry's father, Peter Perrine, married Sarah Rozengrant.

Henry was born April 5, 1797 at Cranbury, New Jersey and in his early manhood taught school in Rock Hill, New York.¹⁶ He studied medicine at the

College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City where he graduated in 1819 as a MD. The faculty of that college was from Columbia University, chartered in 1807 and rejoined Columbia in 1860. After graduation, the young graduate of 22 years of age settled in Bond County, Illinois (near Ripley) in September, 1819. He practiced medicine in Illinois for about four years.

PERRINE, THE YOUNG DOCTOR

From Illinois on November 15, 1820 Dr. Perrine wrote, "I came here on the 30th of September, and got into business immediately. Dr. Drake was not as well satisfied as myself and declined doing much. By the first of this month I booked about \$200, of which \$55 was in one day. During the same month Dr. Drake made only forty dollars, not as much as I did in one day; of that \$55 I feel pretty certain of \$33, which will still make it a good day's work.

"About 22 miles above this is a new seat of

government laid out called Vandalia. A few reside there and by exposure several became sick. I was sent to four, and the fifth a Black. By law I am allowed 50 cts. a mile. That was \$11.00 apiece exclusive of the medicine."³⁵ Dr. Perrine remained in contact with this Dr. Drake throughout his life.

If we can judge from the letters that Dr. Perrine wrote back to his family, his time in Illinois was satisfying. Letters to his brother show him alive with ambition. He wrote: "By all that is free, and all is desirable in freedom, I had rather endure the privations of this country for years, with the prospects I have before me, than to live in Jersey for the same time among comparative conveniences."³⁵

About midway through his stay in Bond County, Illinois, he married Ann Fuller Townsend (1802 - 1876) on January 8, 1822. Ann's father was the Rev. Jesse Townsend and the first pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Palmyra, N.Y. Her mother was Anna May, the third daughter of Rev. Eleazer May, who for 50 years was the pastor of the Congregational Church of



Ann Townsend Perrine from a painting.

Haddam, Mass.

The following year, Ann bore their first child, a daughter named Sarah Ann, on March 24, 1823. A little over a year later, the second daughter, Hester Maria, was born on July 21, 1824. Both daughters were born in Illinois.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication is produced quarterly by the Historical Preservation Society of the Upper Keys, incorporated in the State of Florida on July 7, 1976. COPYRIGHT © 2006. A monthly newsletter is also mailed to members. Subscription is automatic with any membership listed below.

MEMBERSHIP

The Historical Preservation Society of the Upper Keys is a non-profit Florida Corporation and is tax exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3). Preserving and passing on a rich cultural heritage to future generations may well be as good of an investment as you can make. Annual dues are: Family \$20, Supporting \$25, Contributing \$30, Patron \$50 and Life \$300. Your assistance will be appreciated. Please mail your tax exempt memberships fees and receive this publication free. Mail to:

Historical Preservation Society of the Upper Keys
P.O. Box 2200
Key Largo, FL 33037

- Board of Trustees -

Jerry Wilkinson, President

Uldine Henderson, First Vice President

Mary Ann Bolla, Second Vice President

Mary Lou Wilkinson, Secretary/Treasurer

Brenda Altmeier Bob Smith

Joe & Sally Bauer Joe Thomas

Tom Dillon Tom Trump

WRITERS: Jerry Wilkinson

EDITOR: Tom Dillon

PRODUCTION: Mary Lou Wilkinson

PRINTED by: Bradford Printing of Homestead

This edition honors the 90th birthday of long time member Lee Poorbaugh. Happy birthday and thanks for all you have done for us.

To sponsor your named edition, please donate \$300 to help offset the printing costs. *History Talk* is mailed free to members, Monroe County libraries and schools.

Please write to: Jerry Wilkinson, 38 East Beach Road, Tavernier, FL 33070 or e-mail jerry@keyshistory.org. Back issues are available for \$3 including shipping. Visit our web site at: www.keyshistory.org

A serious incident happened to Dr. Perrine while in Illinois and could have influenced his moving away, seemingly to seek warmer climates.

This incident is related by his son, Henry Perrine Jr. in his writings. His son wrote: "For the purpose of warding off or preventing an attack of the malady (malaria) he was in the habit of taking a certain amount of Peruvian Bark before going out in the malarias [sic] night air to visit a patient. The bottle and a measuring glass stood on a shelf near by where he could place his hand upon them even in the dark.

"One evening, having the occasion to visit a patient who lived a mile or two away, he came hastily into the office, and without waiting to procure a light, took down the Peruvian Bark, put the usual quantity into the glass upon the counter. A moment later his student came in with a candle, and at once saw the glass with some remains of the powder in it, and also a white substance mixed with it. He was horrified at the sight, for it was the result of his own carelessness, as he had left a quantity of arsenic in it, and father had unsuspectingly taken the poison.

"Providentially the student knew where he had gone, and knowing that no time must be lost if life was to be saved, he rushed out, found a horse nearby and mounted it barebacked, then he hastened after the doctor at full speed. Fortunately, he succeeded in overtaking him before he entered the patient's house. The poison had already begun its deadly work, but on learning the cause of the burning pain the Doctor told his student what remedies to procure and apply, and their prompt use finally saved his life, but he was confined to his bed for many weeks, and never fully regained his strength."⁹

It is generally believed that this undermined Dr. Perrine's health and he continued to seek a less rigorous climate. As it was, he moved southward to Natchez, Mississippi in 1824 after four years in Illinois. There is not much data about his stay in Mississippi.

PERRINE, THE U.S. CONSUL

Dr. Perrine visited Cuba in 1826. From page 17 of the 25th Congress, 2nd Session, House Report 56, February 17, 1838, "Our first acquaintance with Doctor Perrine commenced in the island of Cuba, to which he was driven by sickness, and by business,

in the spring of 1826. He was then expatiating [lengthy writing-JW] on the advantages to be derived from the introduction of tropical plants to the industry of our free institutions, and the facility with which it could be accomplished, in consequence of the proximity." His voyage to Cuba might have assisted in some way towards his later appointment as U.S. Consul.

The consular appointment was made by President John Quincy Adams in January of 1827. Dr. Perrine's only son, Henry Perrine Jr. was born on March 20, 1827 in Sodus, New York. Evidently Dr. Perrine had delayed his reporting date until after his son was born. The family remained in New York during his absence as U.S. Consul.

In a later letter to a Dr. Ezekiel Johnson Dr. Perrine asked: "Do me a favor to tell me what sum of money I should have probably gained since my arrival here [Mexico] in June, 1827, if I had dedicated myself exclusively to the interested exercise of my profession, instead of generally practicing it gratuitously with hope of promoting the usefulness of this consulate, and my inquiries after plants suitable for the United States." Dr. Johnson's answer was "...ten or twelve thousand dollars."¹ In another letter Dr. Perrine commented, "As the income of this office [Consul] does not furnish a third of the sum required for the economical subsistence of a single person. . ."¹

At the insistence of President John Adams, Secretary of the Treasury, Richard Rush circulated a letter on September 6, 1827 to all consulate officers to procure foreign plants of known, or probable utility, for the cultivation in the United States. Details of this request are contained in Report Number 564 of the 25th Congress.⁴ This concept of a self-supporting nation appealed strongly to Dr. Perrine and he began a large collection of Mexican seeds and plants which he thought beneficial to his homeland. He flooded the Senate, House of Representatives, Departments of Treasury, Army and Navy with detailed reports on botanical data, especially those producing durable fibers.

The above referenced House Report 564 goes on to state, "The Doctor has very judiciously concluded his account of the cultivation of the *Agave sisalana*, in the peninsular of Yucatan, without entering into the details of the great benefits which

would be derived from its cultivation in the peninsular of Florida, as they are evident to every reflecting mind."⁴ These were the times of the sailing ship and fibrous rope was important. It remained of importance for the remainder of the century until the steamship. At the turn of the century during the Spanish American War, the United States seized the Philippines and procured the use of Manila hemp. From then on the emphasis for locally produced fiber for rope subsided. Also, the steamship which required few fiber ropes had come to dominate shipping. It seems that the lack of a machine to process the Agave leaves was the deciding factor for its decline. On October 4, 1832, Dr. Perrine offered \$1,000 for such a machine.⁴ In passing, the need for fiber from the coconut husk was the reason that so many coconuts were planted in the Keys.

Despite his official duties, Dr. Perrine did not forego his practice of medicine. His son, Henry Perrine Jr., wrote that he was almost as busy practicing medicine as he was attending to government affairs.

These were the days of rampant tropical and sub-tropical fevers. Yellow fever, malaria and cholera decimated the countryside. There was no scientific knowledge as to their etiology and being a practical clinician, Dr. Perrine was diligent in recording and publishing his observations. Quinine and cinchona bark were being freely to treat these diseases. The Philadelphia Journal of Medicine and Physical Sciences in 1826 published an article by Dr. Perrine titled: "Fever Treated With Large Doses of Sulphate of Quinine."²³ Dr. Perrine also discovered and cultivated a stingless bee of which he shipped samples to Judge Webb in Key West, however many arrived dead and the others failed to reproduce.

It is fair to state that his work in the Yucatan laid the groundwork for Perrine's work in the Florida Keys. From the works of C.F. Millspaugh, 1904, located in the library of the New York Botanical Garden: "He also conceived the idea of starting a tropical plant station in South Florida and to that end petitioned Congress in 1832 (three years before the start of the Second Seminole War in Florida) for a grant of land in that region after reporting at length upon the subject to the State and Treasury Departments."³⁷ In a Treasury Circular of the 6th. of September, 1827, Mr. Linn says: 'Doctor H. Perrine appears to be the only American Consul who

has unreservedly devoted his head, heart and hands to the subject of introducing tropical plants in the U.S. and his voluminous manuscripts alone exhibit a great amount of labor and research which promises to be highly beneficial to our country."

Mr. Millspaugh continued: "In this work he associated with Mr. James Webb of Key West and Mr. Charles Howe of Indian Key in a 'Tropical Plant Company' whose object was first the production of Henequen (*Agave sisalana*) and secondarily to encourage the introduction and promote the cultivation of tropic plants in the United States. In his various reports to the Department he dwelt to considerable length upon tropical economic botany. During his residence in Campeche he suffered serious attacks of both yellow fever and cholera. During the epidemic of the latter disease in 1833 he remained in the city, when, it is reported, all other physicians fled to the mountains.

"U.S. Senate Doc. 300, 25th Congress, 2nd. Session (1838) contains the following papers by Dr. Perrine:

'Letters on Tropic Plants.'

'Meteorological Tables of Indian Key, etc.'

'List of Officinal and Economic Plants of the Tropics.' This is annotated for plants or seeds already introduced by him into South Florida.

'Cuban Economic Plants' containing lists and remarks upon cereals, roots, farinaceous fruits, edible seeds, vegetables, salads, pulpy fruits, dyes, tans, oils, gums, fibers, resins, etc.

'Tropic Fiber Plants' with 24 plates."

"U.S. House of Rep. Report 564. 25th. Congress, 2nd Session (1838) additionally contains reports made by Dr. Perrine.

'Plants of Mexico.'

'The Agave sisalana or Sisal Hemp.'

'Letters on Tropical Plants.'

'Propagation of Fibrous Leaved Plants.'

From the above, we can conclude that Dr. Perrine did have a well conceived plan before arriving on Indian Key (Christmas day of 1838).

Another part of his plan was the incorporation of The Tropical Plant Company³⁴ approved on July 8, 1838, almost a year before his arrival. The Act of Incorporation contained 20 sections of legal specifications. For example, Section 1 established

Henry Perrine, James Webb (Key West) and Charles Howe (Indian Key) as trustees. Section 2 set the capital stock at \$50,000. Section 20 set the life of the company to be 20 years from the time of organization.

There are references to Dr. Perrine's correspondence with Captain DuBose, the lighthouse keeper for the Cape Florida lighthouse on Key Biscayne, as early as 1833.⁴ Capt. DuBose had planted trees on both Cape Florida and the mainland.

Perrine of Indian Key

The 1838 U.S. Congress approved an Act granting Dr. Perrine a township. This Act is found in volume 9, Laws U.S., page 869, titled "An Act to encourage the introduction and promote the cultivation of tropical plants in the United States. Approved July 7th, 1838."⁵ Therefore, a land grant Act was approved before his arrival on Indian Key which prescribed the conditions for the grant in four sections, but not a specific land location.

Section 1 stated generally that, "to be located in one body of six miles square, upon any portion of the public lands below twenty six degrees north latitude." Note that no specific location was stated and the word township was not stated. Of course a township contains 36 sections or six miles square.

Section 2 stated, "That the said tract of land shall be located within two years from this date by said Henry Perrine." It would be up to Dr. Perrine to choose the specific location, however, he never had the opportunity.

Section 3 in general, "that when any section of land shall be really occupied by a bona fide settler, actually engaged in the propagation or cultivation of valuable tropical plants, and upon proof a patent shall be issued." This would be debated for years after his death with his heirs alleging that some sections were proved and the land grant verified.

Section 4 was the clause reverting any section not complied with back to the United States.

Dr. Perrine landed at New Orleans in the spring of 1837 to pursue his plans to make south Florida the productive tropical plant center of the U.S. The state of Louisiana offered him LaFitte's Island for his tropical plant center. Perrine refused the offer apparently preferring South Florida where he had

been testing his plants for years through the efforts of those like Captain DuBose and Charles Howe. From New Orleans he sailed to Havana, Cuba, Key West, Indian Key, Charleston, Washington, Baltimore and New York.

The details of these stops are not known; however, Hester Perrine related: "My father having resigned his position and been for some months engaged in his surveys in South Florida, and his efforts to awaken an interest in the people of Florida to the culture of Tropical Fruits, and also in presenting his reports to Congress, and they, for his services granting him a Township of Land to be located in South Florida, we prepared to move there.

"There were but few vessels running to southern ports, and for three long months we waited in New York for a sailing vessel that would land us at 'Indian Key.' Believing the 'Seminole War' closed, we had expected to go upon the land at once, and Joel R. Poinsett, the then 'Secretary of War', had promised to make it a military Post, so there need be no fear of Indians. While in New York my father received a letter from the Secretary saying the war had again broken out and it would not be prudent to go to the land.' Then my father decided to go to 'Indian Key' and remain there until we could go to his land, as there was already established there one of his depots of plants sent from 'Yucatan' and under the care of Mr. Charles Howe. We sailed from New York the first week in December 1838, and landed at Indian Key on Christmas morning!"

Hester relates how she and Sarah were on Indian Key, "Shut out from all social life, with the exception of the family of Mr. Howe." The reason was that her father had learned that the officers of the Army and Navy had previously bragged that "they would make the Dr.'s daughters the Belles of the Reef" and he did not intend to allow them to be exposed to their advances. She further explains how "We had an abundance of books and papers, but only a monthly mail." Continuing, "For amusement we sometimes used to fish, learned to use the rifle & pistol, & often go over to 'Lower Matecumbe' with Father when he spent the day there attending to his plants."

Hester describes the visit of Judge Marvin and Stephen Mallory of Key West who came up in a sailing vessel "to pay their respects to the Dr. & his family," but alas for human expectations, the

daughters were not to be seen!"

She also tells of, "a very rare sight. Three great water-spouts coming from the southeast directly towards Indian Key & moving with great velocity. A big gun was loaded to fire into and break them before they could reach us, when their course diverted and they broke near the lower end of Lower Matecumbe. Had they broken upon Indian Key, we should all have been destroyed." Hester's writings have been criticized as inaccurate. Cannon fire will not divert a waterspout.

Hester recalls, "One memorable day, only three days before the Indians came to Indian Key! Father and I went over, and he did but little work and then telling me that 'he had found a place where it would be pleasant for us to take our lunch' took me about a mile down the Beach & then turning into the forest soon brought me to a spot where he parted the branches & there was a 'Fairy Grotto.' In the center was a small sparkling spring perhaps ten or fifteen feet across; various cacti in bloom & fruit, with other flowers upon the bank."

THAT FATAL NIGHT

The story of the Indian raid on Indian Key has been told and retold. Portions of the raid are reenacted annually at the Indian Key Festival. Exactly why Dr. Perrine was killed will probably never be known. Conjecture abounds as to why the Indians attacked. Were they simply revengeful because Captain Jacob Housman had formerly offered, "... to the Governor and Legislative Council of Florida and to the President and national Congress of the United States, to catch or kill all the Indians of South Florida for \$200 each." The attack was three days after a Mr. Downing presented the offer to the Legislature. Or, were they simply desperately in need of food and supplies? Did they mistake Dr. Perrine for Capt. Housman? When they did attack it was at night, which was very unusual for them.

The number of attacking Indians varies from writer to writer. The writer of the first written communication of the attack added a postscript to his military communication of August 7, 1840, "The Indians force at the lowest estimate judging from the numbers of canoes is fifty or sixty, I am obliged to write in great haste. The Indians used the long

guns (cannons) on the Key firing them at us repeatedly with good aim." This was one of the few written reports of the Native Americans firing a cannon.

Hester and Henry both wrote of the night their father was killed.^{9 & 40} In summary, the Perrine family was awakened in the early morning hours of August 7, 1840. Dr. Perrine hid the family in the cellar and said "he would see what he could do." He tried to reason with the attackers. Being unsuccessful, he went to the cupola and barricaded the door. In Hester's words, "For a few moments after they swarmed up the stairs after him, there was a horrid silence, only broken by the blows of their Tomahawks upon the door, then a crash, one wild shriek, a Rifle Shot, & all was still."⁴⁰ The family eventually escaped from the cellar through the attached turtle kraal and made their way to the ship *Medium* anchored off shore of Tea Table Key.

Of the seven reported killed by the St. Augustine NEWS, August 21, 1840, exactly why the four members of the Motte family were chosen to be killed while others appeared to be ignored will also likewise remain speculation forever.

In summary, as Hester stated, "His life was ended." Dr. Perrine was 43 years old.

EPILOGUE

Hester Perrine wrote her unpublished memoirs "For the benefit of the Grandchildren that I so much love I have written a few of the incidentals of a more than usually eventful life." In 1885 and in 1925 Hester donated the manuscript to the Florida Historical Society.

Henry Perrine Jr. wrote "A True Story Of Some Eventful Years In Grandpa's Life" that was published in 1885 by Hutchinson Press. More about Henry Jr.'s trip to the Keys later.

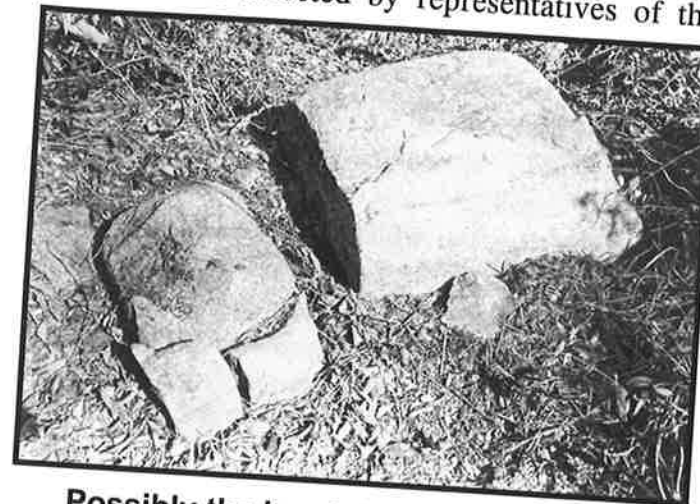
Both Hester and Henry Jr. relate in their writings that only "a few charred human bones, which were doubtless those of my father" were found and those were taken and buried on Lower Matecumbe at the side of a sisal hemp plant. Henry Jr. wrote, "In after years when we wanted to reclaim them for burial in my lot in the beautiful Palmyra Cemetery, all traces of the grave were lost."

Below is a photo taken by John Kunkel Small (1869-1938) in 1906 on one of his trips in the Keys.

The caption at the Florida Archives where I copied the photo is "Thought to be the burial headstone of Dr. Perrine."

The family of Dr. Perrine was well taken care of by military, government, civilian friends and sympathizers. The family moved to Palmyra, New York and Mrs. Perrine was successful in persuading Congress of 1841¹¹ "... to be entitled to all the rights and privileges vested in and granted to the said Dr. Henry Perrine by the act to which this is supplement...."

Land was selected by representatives of the



Possibly the headstone of Dr. Perrine

Perrine family in Township (TS) 55 South, Range (R) 39 East; TS 56 South, R 39 East; TS 55 South, R 40 East and 56 South, R. 40 East in 1847 and designated as the "Perrine Grant." This was about 23,030 acres south of Miami in the area of the present day community of Perrine and Cutler, Florida.⁴⁰

While in New York, Sarah Perrine married Carlton Rogers and Hester Perrine married a James Walker.

Henry Perrine Jr. studied law and was accepted as a lawyer in 1848, the same year he met a Miss Cordelia Hall. During this same period, his uncle Edwin on his mother's side, was building a ship to move to California. His purpose there was to construct saw mills, a venture in which Henry Jr. joined him. Four years later, Henry married Cordelia.

After the massacre, Charles Howe moved to Key West and soon sent his children to Palmyra N.Y. for schooling. Charles remained in contact with Mrs. Perrine and the children concerning the Land Grant and was promised one fifth of the land provided he could effect the conditions of the Land

Grant and prevent its forfeiture.

Congress had not simply given the 36 square miles of land to the Perrine's, there were stipulations. As summarized in the aforementioned 1838 Act, like a homestead claim, there were attached certain stipulations to "prove the claim" and obtain a patented title. Each of the 36 square miles had to be settled, land cleared and specified crops planted.

The Perrine heirs and Charles Howe did take the first step and complied with section two of the original land grant's stipulations by obtaining an official survey of the land in 1847. Stipulations in Sections three and four were more difficult.

Quoting from the original grant that I have, see end note number 5, the words that caught my attention was "be really occupied by a bona fide settler actually engaged."

"Sec. 3. And be it further exacted, That whenever any section of land in said tract shall be really occupied by a bona fide settler actually engaged in the propagation or cultivation of valuable tropical plants, and upon proof thereof being made the Commissioner of the General Land Office, a patent shall issue to the said Henry Perrine and his associates."

The next section provided the forfeiture clause should they tarry too long. Of course, this date was extended many times. Even the State of Florida wanted the land in 1873 to add to the 1850 Swamp Lands parcels, but were denied. See section 4 below.

"SEC 4. And be it further enacted, That every section of land in the tract aforesaid, which shall not be occupied by an actual settler positively engaged in the propagation or cultivation of useful tropical plants within eight years from the location of said tract, or when the said adjacent territory shall be surveyed and offered for sale shall be forfeited to the United States."

The Howe family never lost faith in the value of Dr. Perrine's sisal hemp as a product, or the allegation that Dr. Perrine had promised Charles Howe a fifth of the grant. Henry A. Howe, presumably of the Howe family, on his way from New York to Key West for a hemp machine filed an 1887 lawsuit in Juno, Florida for the 10,000 acres promised by the Perrine heirs. The lawsuit went to the Supreme Court where it was dismissed

in 1898.

Anyway, in 1850 after only five years of statehood for Florida and Miami still 46 years in the future, it is said that Charles Howe obtained 36 Bahamian families to come over and work the land to fulfill the remaining Perrine Grant requirements. Evidently, not much success could be claimed as when settlers arrived in the area after the War Between the States, there were no Bahamians in that area. In any fashion, Congress held fast to its commitment to the Perrine family and continued to allow them time to prove the claim.

In 1875, Henry Perrine Jr. gave up on California and seriously pursued proving the claim himself. In an 1876 manual by the Weed, Parson and Company of Albany, New York, Henry E. Perrine and James E. Walker¹¹ presented a *Biscayne Bay* offer in an 18 page document. For the era it was fairly represented with a punch line offer, "As an inducement to settlers, we will, to each of the first thirty-five families (who will in October or November of this year, locate themselves upon our land with a view to permanent settlement) donate twenty acres of land free of charge, save the condition of erecting a dwelling place thereon, and agreeing to cultivate at least one useful tropical plant. For others who desire to engage largely in the cultivation of the staples named, and who wish to purchase larger tracts of land for that purpose, we will give information as terms, etc., on application to us. We will also dispose of a limited number of lots, of one and two acres each, at 'Perrine' the most eligible location on the bay for a town, called at present Addison's Landing."

Henry, himself with two of his children, Carlton and Henry, moved onto the property in 1876 bringing considerable supplies with them. It was apparently on this trip that he revisited Indian Key and Lignumvitae Key. The Perrines set up a tent near the Addison family - who had been in the Cutler, Florida area for many years. As a northern attorney, Henry Jr. was beset almost immediately by the problems of living in a relative wilderness. He had only a handful of prospectors from his advertisement, ants attacked his food supply, the land was very rocky, funds ran out before a wharf could be completed and a hurricane came along and destroyed what had been completed.

Henry was determined to established his

"Perrineville" and some of his crops were reasonably successful, but his only practical market was Key West. His prospectors branched out on their own, since they could get 160 acres by homesteading, and Henry Jr. threw in the towel after about eight months.

Homesteaders were flocking to South Dade County for their nearly free 160 acre tracts of land; however, Congress remained steadfast that the Perrine Grant was not to be homesteaded. By 1886, many families had squatted on land within the Perrine Grant and had built farms. To protect their investment they formed a "Squatter's Union" with Dr. Cutler as their representative.

The Perrine heirs were joined by the Florida East Coast Railway to settle the claim, naturally for a price. Claims and counter claims ensued and a Senate investigation which I do not have a copy. Anyway, in 1897 a settlement was made for which I have heard many different numbers of acres. I am relatively certain that the Perrine heirs received an undivided one half interest, the Florida East Coast



Sarah, Henry Jr. and Hester Perrine ca. 1870

Railway an undivided one quarter interest and the remaining one quarter interest was divided amongst other parties.

Case closed? Wrong. The Howe heirs sued about everybody involved, alleging that half of the Perrine Grant was theirs from the very beginning. In

addition, the F.E.C. Railway planned to "cut down trees, destroy vegetation, dig up the soil and construct ditches and embankments . . . to the permanent and irreparable injury of said land." An Orlando court ruled that the railroads and the settlers could not be sued and the Supreme Court dismissed the case on November 11, 1898.

Henry Flagler built the railroad through his portion in 1902 and 1903 and today's community of Perrine came into existence in 1903 as a railroad camp and supply depot named Perrine. The railroad workers created a need for a small store. The population grew to about 300 and it had its first school in 1909. The first church was in the home of Margaret Cabot, also the school teacher.

Today, Perrine is a thriving community and Dr. Perrine's prized *Agave sisalana* now only grows wild to my knowledge.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. House of Representatives, 22d Congress, 1st Session, Document Number 198, April 6, 1832.
2. House of Representatives, 22d Congress, 1st Session, Report 454, April 26, 1832.
3. U.S. Senate Document 300, 25th Congress. 2d Session, March 12, 1838.
4. U.S. House of Representatives, Report 564, 25th Congress, 2d Session, February 17, 1838.
5. U.S. Senate, Report 94, January 29, 1946, 29th Congress, 1st Session.
6. U.S. Senate Report 111, February 3, 1846, 29th Congress, 1st Session.
7. Editorial Notes, Hovey's magazine of Horticulture, Vol 6, pp 358-360, 1840 and Vol 7, p 34, 1841.
8. Army and Navy Chronicle, Vol. 11, pp 154, 155, 1840.
9. Henry E. Perrine, Some Eventful Years in Grandpa's Life, Hutchinson Press, Buffalo, New York.
10. John. T. Sprague, The Florida War, 1848, Univ. of Florida Press.
11. U.S. Senate Report No. 1574, 54th Congress, 2d Session, March 3, 1897, Act of February 18, 1841.
12. Harriet P. House, "An Untold Story of the Florida War", in Harper's Magazine, Vol. 83, pps 591-594, 1891.
13. J.K. Small, in Journal of the N.Y. Botanical Garden, Vol. 22, pps 216-17.

14. Jefferson Bell, in Miami Herald, March 2, 1924.
15. Frances F. Cleveland Preston, "A Hero of Horticulture", in bulletin of the Garden Club of America, no. 18, pp 2-8, 1931.
16. T.R. Robinson, Proceedings of the Florida State Horticultural Society for 1931, pps 110 -116.
17. T. Ralph Robinson, Perrine and Florida Tree Cotton, Tequesta Number 7, 1947.
18. Hester Perrine Walker, "Reminiscences of Dr. Perrine", in Florida.
19. Farmer and Fruit Grower, March, 1888.
20. Daniel Drake, "Death of Dr. Perrine", Western Journal of Medicine and Surgery, pps 321-323, 1st Series, Vol. 2, Surgeon Generals Library.
21. Howard A. Kelly, "Dictionary of American Medical Biography, pp 961, 1928.
22. Sarah W. Palmer, "Henry Perrine, Pioneer Botanist and Horticulture", Florida Historical, Society Quarterly, pps 112-115, Vol. 5, October 1926.
23. Henry Perrine, "Fever Treated With Large Doses of Sulfate of Quinine, in Adams County, Natchez, Miss.", The Philadelphia Journal of Medical and Physical Sciences, pps 36-41, Vol 4, 1826.
24. S. A. Richmond, "The Perrine Grant", Tropic Magazine, April-September, 1915.
25. Hester Perrine Walker, "Massacre at Indian Key, August 7, 1840 and the Death of Dr. Perrine", Florida Historical Society Quarterly, pps 18-42, Vol 5, July, 1926.
26. Miami Metropolis, "Written in 1840", Miami, Florida, May 4, 1900.
27. Charleston Daily Chronicle, Charleston, S.C., January 19, 1858.
28. The News, St. Augustine, August 21, 1840.
29. Florida Times Union, "Along the Florida Keys", May 22, 1892.
30. Washington Daily National Intelligence, "The Indian Key Massacre", December 19, 1840.
31. Niles National Register, pp 406, August 29, 1840.
32. Wyatt Blassingame and Richard Glendinning, "The Frontier Doctors", 1963
33. Journal of the Florida Medical Association, Dr. Henry Perrine - Versatile Florida Pioneer', July, 1952.
34. An Act to Incorporate the Tropical Plant Company of Florida, P.K. Yonge Library, Gainesville, Florida.

35. Edward Jelks, M.D., Dr. Henry Perrine, Jacksonville Historical Society Annual, 1933-34.
36. Letters by Dr. Henry Perrine (To Dr. Ralph Glover, June 12 and July 17, 1840), Tequesta, 1979, page 29.
37. C.F. Millspaugh, 1904, Library of New York Botanical Garden.
38. Dr. Perrine to the Editor of the Farmers' Register, January 1, 1840.
39. Massacre at Indian Key, August 7, 1840 and the Death of Doctor Henry Perrine, an unpublished manuscript of Mrs. Hester Perrine Walker, Florida Historical Quarterly, July 1926 - Volume 5.
40. History of the Title of the Perrine Grant, Dr. S.H. Richmond Abstract, January 19, 1911.

Mr. Perrine's Statement By Jerry Wilkinson

The story of the Perrine Land Grant has been told in about as many different variations as Florida history can be told. There are many reasons for this: Congress authorized the land grant in 1838, but Dr. Perrine was killed before he could choose a location. Congress approved the Perrine heirs as the successor of the land grant. The land grant was finally selected was about 23,030 acres. The Seminole Wars last up to the late 1850s. The Perrine heirs live in New Jersey, and they had very little capital to "prove" the land claims. Florida was a frontier state with squatters and homesteaders streaming into South Florida seeking land. Official land surveys were difficult to come by.

Two other facts further complicated writing a comprehensive history: 1) Henry Flagler needed a right-of-way completely and diagonally through almost the middle of the 36-square miles. 2) Henry Perrine Jr. married the mother of President Grover Cleveland's wife, Frances Folsom. This caused allegations that there was inside influence for the heirs and Henry Flagler.

Dr. Joe Knetsch of Tallahassee, Florida and a Florida historian is preparing for the Historical Society a future article describing the intricacies of the Perrine Land Grant.

The title history has been difficult for a long

time. We know it was resolved as Flagler built his railroad where he wanted to, settlers were able to obtain patented deeds and the city of Perrine was incorporated.

With that said, *The Buffalo Courier*, published the following newspaper article I am guessing some time around 1900. As with a lot of the Perrine Land Grant material, the copy is incomplete. In this case, who ever made the copy that I found did not include the date of the article. You will see at the article's end that it is written by Dr. Perrine's son, Henry E. Perrine (Jr.) who was living in Buffalo, New York at the time. He died May 30, 1901 survived by his wife and three children.

"Mr. PERRINE'S STATEMENT - He Makes Reply Regarding the Land in Florida -

"So much has been said in regard to the much-talked of Perrine Land grants that Mr. Henry Perrine [Jr.] was asked for a statement in regard to them. He gave the following clear outline of the famous case:

"To The *Courier*:

The issuing of a patent for the so-called Perrine Grant has elicited so much of misinformation in regard to it, that I will as briefly as possible give the true history of the case.

"Dr. Henry Perrine while Consul at Campeche in Yucatan in 1827 or 1828, received a circular letter from the [U.S.] Secretary of State instructing him to obtain all possible information relative to valuable plants not indignant in the United States, with a view in their introduction and propagation, if possible, in this country.

"Being an enthusiastic botanist he entered heartily into the work. He appears to have been the only Consul who exhibited any particular zeal in obeying the instructions contained in the letter. Through the gratitude of the poor, who he practiced [medicine] during the fearful cholera season of 1832, he was able to procure many valuable seeds and plants whose vitality had destroyed by soaking in boiling water as had formerly been the case owing to the jealousy of the priests.

"The extent of his labors, and the vast fund of information obtained by him as result of the research, can only be appreciated by looking over the documents which he laid before Congress, and which were

published in 1838, at the time of the passage of the act granting to him and his associates, on certain conditions, a township of land in south Florida.

"His family during his absence had remained in Palmyra, N.Y., for the better facilities for the education of his children, but after the passage of the act he decided to remove them to Indian Key, a small island about 20 miles south of Cape Sable, the extreme limit of Florida. There he had established a nursery for his botanical plants, and was waiting the termination of the Seminole War which was thought to be near its close. When it was ended he expected to locate the grant and establish his family upon it. It was supposed that [Indian Key] being so far from the mainland no danger need be apprehended from the Indians - particularly as there was a military post for invalid soldiers on Tea Table Key, only a mile and a half distant.

Murdered By Indians

"During the night, or early morning of August 7, 1840 about 200 Indians landed upon Indian Key and Dr. Perrine was killed. His family made a marvelous escape in their night garments, after being secreted for nine hours in the waters under a wharf, over which the savages carried their plunder to their boats. Destitute in everything they received aid in money and clothing from kind hearted officers and others, with free transportation nearly to their old home in Palmyra.

"In February, 1841, Congress passed another bill granting the land to Mrs. Perrine, her two daughters and son, upon the same conditions. Mr. Charles Howe, Deputy Collector and Postmaster at Indian Key and afterwards collector at Key West, undertook to comply the conditions and only failed in one particular, viz.: placing an active settler upon every section - the presence of Indians frightened away the intended colony. Without capital the family could do nothing and so the matter has dragged along from year to year, notwithstanding earnest efforts to get capital interested.

Known as the Perrine Grant

"This grant has been known upon the government maps as the 'Perrine Grant' - many efforts have been made by squatters to obtain preemption claims, but their request have been denied and it has been passed on as a 'life claim' and a just one, both by Hoke Smith and Secretary Francis. The parties who

have taken the matter up for the heirs and have fulfilled all the conditions imposed by Congress will be reimbursed from the land for their labor and expenditures. One plant alone, which was brought from the Yucatan by Dr. Perrine, when largely cultivated will be the means of retaining several millions of dollars in this country which now go abroad. I allude to the Sisal Hemp plant.

But Tardy Justice

"It is but tardy justice for the heirs to have this claim allowed. No money has ever been allowed them for the hopes of Indian Key, although hundreds of similar claims have been paid. It has not been pressed for the reason that it was feared it would prejudice the others.

"It is hardly worth while to notice the mean innuendo that the issuing the patent is owing in 'influence of powerful relatives.'

"As a matter of fact the President has never been approached directly or indirectly upon the subject. There was no occasion to seek his influence, and those who know his sturdy honesty best, know that he could not be prevailed upon to interfere in behalf of any one whose claim was at all doubtful.

"Now as to the squatters being removed, an amicable settlement was made with them last summer by allowing them 40 acres each on separate sections.

HENRY H. PERRINE"

Agave sisalana By Jerry Wilkinson

There is little doubt that Dr. Perrine and his works with the *Agave sisalana* (century plant) are perhaps the best known albeit it is shown in government documents that he brought plants and/or seeds for 71 plants to the Keys area. The 13 that were found to be already existing are clearly marked in the list.

The times when Dr. Perrine entered the botanical field were times of the sailing vessel and these required many kinds of lines (ropes) and sizes. The importation of Manila hemp did not begin until the Spanish American War in 1898. The sisal plant was exactly what Secretary of Treasury Richard Rush was seeking.

The following undated article gives a reasonable summary of the ongoing work. The "Tropical Plant

Company" mentioned was incorporated on February 8, 1838; therefore I assume that it was some time in March 1838. Here is the article:

From the Boston, (Mass.) *Gazette*.

"THE AGAVE SISALANA, AND SISAL HEMP.

"In our paper of the 4th of January, we called the attention of readers to an extract of a letter, on the plants of Mexico, from Doctor H. Perrine, the American Consul for Campeche, to the Secretary of the Treasury, which was published in the Washington Globe of the 19th November last. We now particularly invite their attention to another extract of a letter on a single cultivated plant of Yucatan, from the same gentleman to Dr. Howell of Princeton, New Jersey, which was published in the Telegraph of the 17th ultimo, and which will be found in the first page of this paper. The importance attached by the Lyceum of Natural History of New York to the subject of this article, is manifested by that society in a unanimous resolution recommending it to national patronage. By the Tallahassee Floridian of the 3d ultimo, we perceive that the Governor of that Territory, in his message to the Legislative Council, warmly applauds the important enterprise suggested in the letter of Dr. Perrine to the Treasury Department, of domesticating tropical plants in the southern extremity of Florida by means of an incorporated company, and hopes that the National Government will aid him by a grant of land or otherwise, to accomplish this laudable object of his ambition. In the same paper of the 17th ultimo, we observe the passage of an act, with the title of the

"Tropical Plant Company of Florida," which is said to be composed of the most distinguished residents of that peninsula. And we hope to see an announcement in the Washington papers that the General Government has given its testimony to the importance of this great enterprise, and of the services of Doctor Perrine, by an act of Congress granting him an ample tract of land in the unsettled tropical extremity of East Florida, to encourage the introduction and promote the culture of tropical plants. Such a tract of land thus granted, although in quantity not a pecuniary equivalent to his sacrifices in obeying the Treasury circular of September 6, 1827, would have a recommendatory value to attract capital and associates disposed to subserve his most

liberal views for the public good, and his own consequent reputation, even at the expense of their own *immediate* interests. Of the ultimate gain both to individuals and the country at large, we have no doubt, but we do entertain a great doubt whether this national enterprise will be effectually pursued for many years to come, without the directing influence of the individual zeal, energy, perseverance, and patriotic ambition, of Doctor Perrine. Our first acquaintance with the Doctor commenced in the Island of Cuba, to which he was driven by sickness, and we by business, in the spring of 1826. He was then expatiating on the advantages to be derived from the introduction of tropical plants to the industry of our free institutions, and the facility with which it could be accomplished is consequence of the proximity of Florida.

"From a resolution of Congress the ensuing year; the introduction of exotics in general was undertaken by the Government of the United States by means of the Treasury circular addressed to a portion of the American consuls, of whom, as far as we can learn, Dr. Perrine is the only one who has taken any effectual measures to promote its objects, by acquiring useful intelligence concerning the various valuable plants abounding in his consular district, which, until very recently, included, with the peninsula of Yucatan, the state of To??co [city in Mexico]. Although the circular intimated the possibility of an appropriation of funds by Congress, none has hitherto been made, and in this state this national enterprise at present remains, virtually and apparently entirely abandoned by the National Government. The most important department of it, however, viz. the domestication of tropical plants, we hope to see accomplished by the persevering public spirit of Dr. Perrine. It is useless to specify the many useful trees and plants which will be thus introduced for food, drink and medicine, for cheap clothing, for sumptuous furniture, for domestic utensils, for the ornament of our dwellings, for the durability of our shipping, for extensive consumption' in our manufactures and the arts, in short for many of the necessities and comforts and luxuries of civilized life. It is sufficient to contemplate the advantages which will accrue to the nation in general from the introduction of the single species of tropical plants which produces the Sisal hemp, to show that it merits the special patronage of Government.

"The Doctor has very judiciously concluded his account of the cultivation of the Agave Sisalana in the peninsula of Yucatan, without entering into details of the great benefits which would be derived from its cultivation in the peninsula of Florida, as they are evident to every reflecting mind. Although its culture requires a considerable superficies of soil, it needs but a trifling amount of labor, which exactly adapts it to the agriculture of our country, where land is cheap and labor is dear. The quantity or cost of the soil is a very inconsiderable item in the calculation of an American planter. The capital necessary to be added to it, or employed upon it, constitutes his only embarrassment, and the great desideratum therefore is a staple for cultivation which, with the least total amount of money, will produce the greatest proportional gain. The Agave Sisalana supplies this great object sought. - What object of cultivation in the United States, nay in the world, unites in so great a degree these peculiar advantages? We shall have the tea plant, the olive, and the vine, but we trust that many, many years will elapse before we are obliged to compete with the French; and the Italians, and the Chinese, in making their culture a means of subsistence for a crowded and necessitous population. From the planting of the Sisal hemp to the cutting of its leaves how trifling, is the amount of labor bestowed! How equable its division through the year! how [sic] abundant the reproduction! How long the duration! Indeed, it scarcely needs more care and cost than the trees of our forests. The principal capital and labor devoted to it, (which we may estimate at three fourths of the whole) commence only with the extraction of the fibres from the fresh leaves to furnish the raw material for the manufacturing market; and this preparation may be called the semi manufacture of the planter, which begins where pure cultivation ends. The cut leaves are in the same relative condition to the planter as the plucked cotton. The labor of separating the seeds before the invention of Whitney's gin, rendered it a comparatively worthless object of cultivation. Can we believe that the agave Sisalana will be long a citizen of the United States without the invention of a corresponding machine to extract its fibres? If the Sisal hemp be a profitable article to the inhabitants of Yucatan at one hundred dollars the ton without any labor saving machinery, how much more profitable will it be to the inhabitants of

Florida at two hundred dollars, when aided by American intelligence, industry and ingenuity?"

We know that the cotton gin was patented in 1794 and assuming the above was written in 1838, we can see their concern with "machinery" to do the work. The machines were known as "decorticating machines." They would strip the pulp from the leaves leaving the fibers to be washed and dried. It is amazing the amount and quality of fiber that can be obtained from one sisal leaf. Try it some time.

The following is a series of photos of a native of Mexico processing sisal hemp the old fashion way.



In the above photo the lady is beating a leaf of the century plant (sisal) on a log with a wooden stick. This crushes the leaf's skin and pulp and allows it to be washed and separated from the fibers. Not seen well are other leaves to the right on the log.

The next step requires a good source of water that is needed to wash away the pulp exposed by the beatings. This process is repeated over and over until a clean strand of fibers exist. Normally, they remain connected to the sharp barb or point at the end of the leaf. There will be 10 to 30 separate fibers running the entire length of the leaf. This is most of the decorticating process that machinery did. A photo of the fibers after a thorough washing is on the next page.

Shown on the next page is the next step which is to dry the fibers. This can be done simply in the sun

or with a mechanical dryer of some type.



There are many uses for the fibers. One shown in the series of photos that I have is for weaving. On the next page, top-right, the same person is shown weaving a hat.

Below that photo are shown two of the hats she made along with a small strand of the sisal fibers between the two hats.

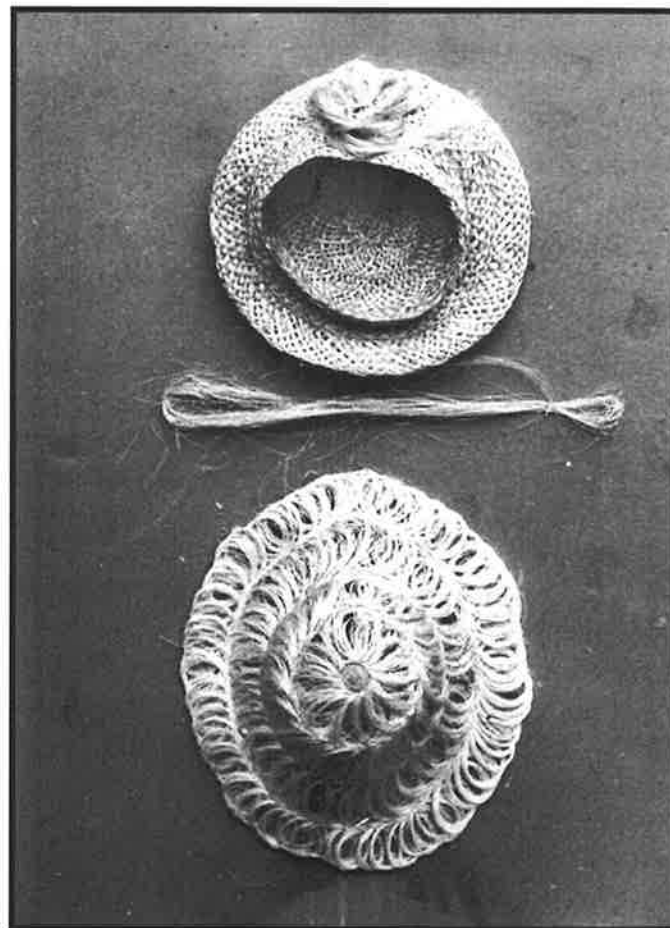
The large plant of the "Sisal and Hemp Development Company" at St. James, FL mostly imported the already prepared fibers. The hemp was from the Philippines and the sisal was from the Bahamas. When it was discovered that sisal could be grown more inexpensively elsewhere, the promising venture at St. James City was abandoned and the buildings fell into ruin. I speculate that labor costs was the deciding factor.

Commodore Monroe relates in chapter 19 of his book, *The Commodore's Story*, of Mr. Charles Dodge of the Department of Agriculture in 1890-91 making a trip from Jupiter to Fort Myers with a view of developing a sisal hemp industry in Florida. Not many of the specifics of sisal is noted in his book other than the setting up a "Van Buren decorticating machine" and crediting Dr. Perrine for "...thousands of descendants of the sisal...." in the area.

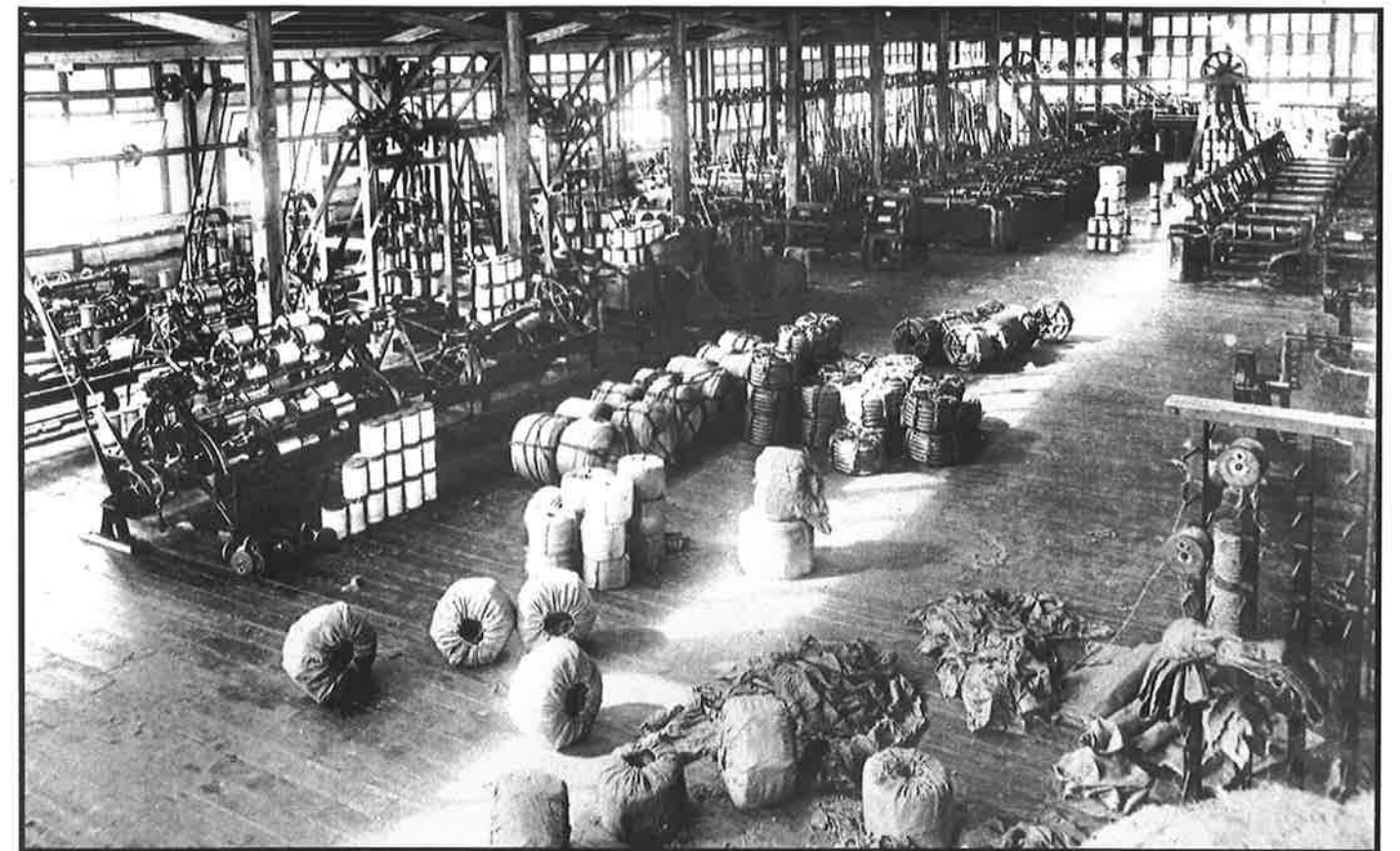
Florida land became far too valuable, so the commercial use of sisal faded into oblivion.



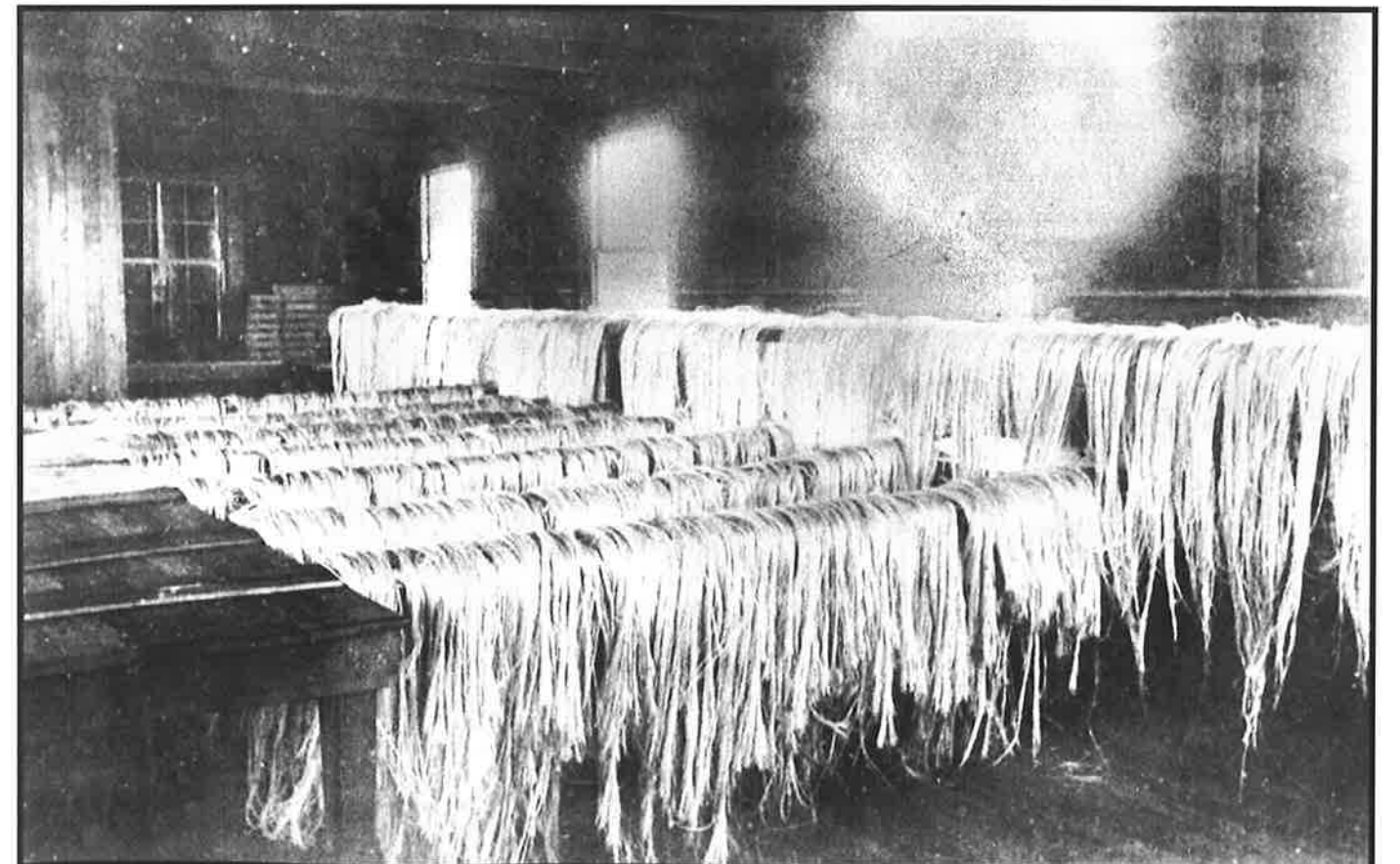
Weaving a hat using sisal fibers



Examples of handmade sisal hemp hats



A sisal & hemp processing plant at St. James on Pine Island, FL ca. 1910



Sisal hemp drying at Commodore Monroe's "Factory" at Coconut Grove, FL ca.1892



A wide spreading banyan tree some place on the Perrine Grant hundreds of years old at the time of this photograph in 1876. The people are not indentedified.

History Talk, Spring, 2006 Page 568

**The Historical
Preservation Society
of the Upper Keys
P.O. Box 2200
Key Largo, Fl 33037**

**BULK RATE
U.S. Postage PAID
TAVERNIER, FL 33070
PERMIT NO. 29
NON-PROFIT**